

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION
OF BODY IMAGE AND
WEIGHT LOSS BEHAVIOUR
AMONG OVERWEIGHT ADOLESCENTS**

SURIATI BINTI SIDEK

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Health Sciences

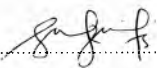
July 2016

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

Name of Student	:	Suriati Binti Sidek
Student I.D. No.	:	2011181261
Programme	:	Doctor of Philosophy- HS990
Faculty	:	Faculty of Health Sciences
Thesis Title	:	Social Construction of Body Image and Weight Loss Behaviour among Overweight Adolescents

Signature of Student	:	
Date	:	July 2016

ABSTRACT

Obesity among adolescents is often associated with body image dissatisfaction. However, very few studies have examined body image, as a social construct, among overweight adolescents in Malaysia, and the process by which such construction is perceived, experienced and reacted to through various social interactions. The literatures also show that body dissatisfaction may lead to disordered eating behaviour, as a means to improve physical appearance. Therefore, this phenomenological study that was guided by the social constructionism lens, aims to explore the construct of body image and weight loss behaviour among overweight adolescents. Thirty-three in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 to 17 years old male and female overweight adolescents from an urban setting in Selangor were analysed using thematic analysis. The present study found that body image is conceptualised through perceptual, affective, cognitive and behavioural domains of overweight adolescents. Overweight adolescents perceived body attributes as more important than other physical characteristics. They described their body image as it is based on the appearance comments and criticism that they received from social interactions with peers and parents. Most of them wanted to be thin for social acceptance. They believed that they may have difficulties in looking for a partner and susceptible to diseases based on their observation of other people and through available information from significant others and the media. They experienced weight-related teasing, peer rejection and negative stereotyping in daily encounters. These perceptions, beliefs, and personal experiences and observation may lead to body dissatisfaction. Although most participants are dissatisfied with their current body image, few however were having positive views of their bodies by highlighting the self-enhancement mechanisms. All overweight adolescents interviewed in this study, including those with a positive view of their body image wanted to reduce weight. These findings suggest that the link between body image and weight loss behaviour was the intention to lose weight. They believed they can reduce weight by dieting, participating in physical activities and consuming slimming products. However, skipping meal was the preferred weight loss behaviour and this finding suggests that overweight adolescents lack information related to healthy weight loss. Their preferences of weight loss behaviour are influenced by advices and feedbacks from significant others and sources of information from the media, and are limited by some of the barriers. This study has given a significant contribution to the current knowledge with respect to the methodological approach and the conceptual framework of body image and weight loss behaviour in the form of a newly developed framework. The proposed framework may explain the construct of body image and weight loss behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	Page ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Obesity and Body Image	4
1.2.1 The Prevalence of Obesity	4
1.2.2 Overweight Adolescents: A Potentially Vulnerable Population	5
1.2.3 Obesity Stigma, Negative Experiences and Health-Related Consequences as an Overweight Adolescent	6
1.3 Body Image Studies in Malaysia	8
1.4 Body Image and Weight Loss Behaviour	9
1.5 The Research Gap	10
1.6 Objectives of Study	12
1.7 Research Questions	13
1.8 Assumptions	13
1.9 Significance of Study	14
1.10 Conceptual Framework	15
1.11 Definition of Terms	17

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A wide variation of body image definitions have been proposed in literature as derived from authors of many disciplines. The body image was first studied by Schilder in 1950. In Schilder's book, '*The image and appearance of the human body*', he described the body image as a self-appearance of the individual. However, he claimed that body image is "...*not a mere perception. There are mental pictures and representations involved in it, but it is not mere representation*" (p. 11). Based on this definition, it is less clear what single entity that Schilder was trying to describe and it indicates a number of complex ideas about the body image.

The National Eating Disorders Association (2005) defined body image that involves attitudinal aspect which refers to "*How you feel about your body, including your height, shape and weight*" (p.1). Body image has also been defined as "*a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body*" (Grogan, 2008, p. 3). In addition to self-perceptions, cognitions and affects, the behaviour aspect is also characterized as related to the body image term (Muth & Cash, 1997). Other authors refer the body image as the evaluation of body attractiveness (Bakhshi & Baker, 2011). However, as suggested by Cash (2004), the term body image is not only focused on the physical appearance, but also incorporates the psychological experience of embodiment. The meaning of body image has also been described as the perceptions and ideas of an individual physical appearance and it represents the individual's overall self-image (Vilhjalmsson, Kristjansdottir & Ward, 2012).

Based on these definitions, the body image is conceptualised as multifaceted (Brantley & Clifford, 1979) and it includes multidimensional constructs (Banfield & McCabe, 2002; Cash, 2004; Grogan, 2008). Generally, the concept of body image depends on the epistemological postulations about the nature of the mind, the body, the